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## Mail Opened 431 Times On Warrants

United Press International

The chief U.S. Postal Service inspector has testified that there have been 431 cases during the past two years in which an individual's mail was opened after issuance of a search warrant.

William J. Cotter also indicated yesterday that the CIA may have been involved in mail openings beyond the 431 authorized by court orders, but he refused to comment publicly on the number.

Appearing before a House subcommittee on postal facilities and mail, Cotter gave further information on CIA mail opening activities to lawmakers in executive session.

When committee members asked Cotter about how extensive past CIA mail opening practices had been, he replied, "I would feel much freer ... to discuss this if we were in executive session." He refused to publicly reveal any details of the CIA mail openings, including what criteria is used in allowing the agency to engage in such activities.

During the public part of the hearing, Cotter reviewed current practices on mail openings and mail covers as well as a CIA "20-year project" during which mail to and from the Soviet Union was opened.

Cotter, a former CIA agent, said a mail cover involves recording information from the outside of the envelope, but not actual opening of letters. A cover may be instituted to assist in locating a fugitive, to obtain evidence on the commission or attempted commission of a crime and to "protect the national security," he said.

At present there are 353 mail covers in place around the country, but during a year there might be 1,000 covers, he said. Cover authority is issued for a 30-day period, but can be renewed.

Only the chief postal inspector can authorize national security category covers, Cotter said, and 95 percent of those requests come from the FBI.

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